

proceeded much more rapidly than at the other sites, due to Krainev's more frequent visits. The chief of the Russian guards was more feared than any German.

After a few days' labour, the bomb was found and dug free. Two small flatcars were pushed up along the adjacent track, and logs were laid for rolling the bomb onto the cars. At this point, however, a Hitlerite officer suddenly appeared, with several soldiers, and ordered a halt.

It occurred to Krainev that he was probably being watched.

CHAPTER FIFTY

Opanasenko had remained in town to take care of his house and belongings.

It was a fine house the head foreman had bought himself, not long before the war: white brick, bright and cheerful, its big front windows facing the South. Roomy, comfortable, well provided, it made a pleasant home in which to entertain his friends. Another treasured asset was the piano he had purchased for his daughter, Svetlana, quite a big girl now, would play and sing delightfully when there was company, and

Opanasenko was very proud of her accomplishments. There was only one trouble about Svetlana: instead of her mother's quiet humility, she displayed a determined character of her own. True, she would hear out her father's admonitions with every appearance of respect; but when it came to the proof, she acted as she herself found fit, and not as her father bade. And she was only fifteen, too. When she got a little older, there would probably be no managing her at all. Even now, she would sometimes glance at her father with open reproach. Yes, domestic rebellion was obviously in the air.

Rebellion came, and sooner than Opanasenko had expected. Coming home from work one day, at the time when people were preparing for evacuation, he found his daughter stuffing books and music into a suitcase full of clothes.

"Where do you think you're going, Svetlana?" he asked.

"The same place as everybody," she returned. "I'm not going to stay here all alone. My whole class is leaving, and the school. And I'm a Pioneer leader, too!"

This was said with a very determined air. Knowing her father's intention to remain in town, Svetlana realized that she would have no easy contest.

"What do you mean—all alone?" Opanasenko demanded. "You'll be staying here with your family."

"Mother's leaving too," the girl declared.

This was a shock from an unexpected quarter.

"What? Without a word to me?" he cried indignantly. "Who's the master in this house, I'd like to know? Who's the head of the family?"

"Well, but, father, don't you see—everyone has two families, you say yourself. One family—that's a person's relatives; and the other is the collective, the people he works with, or studies with."

Opanasenko frowned. No, one should never talk before one's children! This comparison of collective and family—a thought expressed by the shop manager at a trade union meeting—had so struck the head foreman that he had repeated it several times at home; and now his own words were being used against him!

"And which family means more to you?" he asked his daughter.

"The one that teaches me what's right," she replied primly.

He sank heavily into a chair. Children, nowadays! Here he had poked fun at Sasha's mother, because she couldn't manage her boy, and now.... Looking out at his daughter from under knitted brows, as he was wont to look at his subordinates

in the shop when displeased with their work, he asked:

“So your father and mother have taught you wrong—is that what you mean to say?”

“No, they’ve never taught me wrong,” the girl replied, flushing painfully in the realization that she had gone too far. But then, with a sudden defiant gesture, she went on: “Only what good have they taught me? All a person hears in this house is, ‘I’m the master,’ ‘I’m the head of the family.’ Yes, and so you are the master, the way they used to be in the old times. You make mother a regular . . .”

“Praskovya!” roared Opanasenko, jumping to his feet. “Praskovya Petrovna!”

His wife appeared immediately in the doorway. She had been in the next room, listening anxiously to the debate between father and daughter.

“What’s been going on here, behind my back?” Opanasenko demanded. “Planning to leave, are you?”

“We ought to be going, Yevstigneyevich. Everyone is. It’s sort of frightening, to stay behind.”

“And where will you come home to, afterwards? Where will you come home to, can you tell me? There won’t be anything left, and we’ll have to start again with empty hands. All the

years I worked for this home of ours—for you, I did it. And now you want to leave. Do you think I can keep it safe for you all alone, without your help? Our first house burnt down in the Civil War. If this goes too, that's the end of it. We'll never have another."

His wife and daughter heard him out attentively. Praskovya Petrovna seemed on the verge of tears; but Svetlana maintained stoutly:

"Well, and what of it? What do we need a house for? We can rent an apartment."

Opanasenko changed his tactics.

"All right, go ahead then," he said. "Leave me here alone." And softly, as though to himself, he added: "Everyone has two families. One is his relatives, the other—his collective. And I have none left at all. I've broken away from the collective, and my people are breaking away from me. Well, well, go ahead. I wish you happiness."

For some time after this he stayed day and night at the works, keeping away from home in a sort of endurance contest with his family. Praskovya Petrovna yielded. Resolutely (she could always be resolute when carrying out her husband's will), she declared that she would neither leave herself nor let Svetlana go.

"I'll lie down on the tracks before your train," she told her daughter. "You can go, if

you want to, over my body. But I won't leave your father here alone, and I won't stay here without you."

Had her father come home, had he shouted, fumed, forbidden, Svetlana might have evaded her mother's watchful eye and left. But her father had granted permission and disappeared. And--Svetlana stayed.

All her friends had already left, in any case, and had she determined to go she would have had to travel with strangers.

Then, one day, they learned that the last train was gone. Opanasenko, returning from the silent works, found his wife and daughter in tears.

"What are you whimpering at?" he demanded sternly, and added, with a contemptuous shrug, "We'll come through. I've seen plenty of foreigners in my day. I worked under Belgians, in the old times, and Frenchmen, and Germans, too. There was a German foreman at the works when I was young. All the bottles I drank with him, trying to worm out his steel-making secrets. And it was just wasted time. He knew less than I did. A rotter, he was, true enough. But just the same, he was a human being, not a wild beast."

Catching the German quartermaster's eye, Opanasenko's comfortable home was assigned to

three Hitlerite officers, who established themselves at once as masters in the household. Praskovya Petrovna was obliged to black their boots, launder their linen, and make their beds. True, they were neat and clean, and addressed Praskovya Petrovna civilly enough as "Mutti"; and Opanasenko pretended to be quite pleased.

"There!" he told his wife. "Didn't I say they were no wild beasts? The washing, of course—that's hard on you, I know. But it can't be helped, Praskovya. Just be patient."

Actually, however, Opanasenko realized from the very first days of the occupation how greatly he had miscalculated. No, the Hitlerites were an entirely different breed, not to be compared with that one-time German foreman who had been a rotter, but not a beast. His heart cried, and his reason confirmed, that he had made a dreadful blunder. Opanasenko was ashamed to face his comrades at the works; but they, after all, had committed the same irreparable blunder as he. They, too, had seen fit to remain in the town under the Germans, and were now compelled, just as he was compelled, to work for the enemy. They were his equals in misfortune, and with them he could discuss the situation frankly.

At home, on the other hand, sensing his immeasurable guilt towards his wife, and partic-

ularly towards his daughter, Opanasenko attempted to conceal his true feelings—to pretend that all was going well and precisely as he had expected.

Svetlana was not to be fooled thus easily. She sensed the hollow ring behind her father's words. Moreover, Sasha often told her of Opanasenko's conduct at the works. Praskovya Petrovna, however, could only wonder at her husband's seeming patience. Deeply religious, of one of the "old believer" sects, Praskovya Petrovna had always submitted meekly to whatever blows fate might have in store; but she had never known her husband meek or submissive.

As an officers' billet, Opanasenko's home was safeguarded against night raids, against violence and plunder on the part of the German soldiery.

One of the officers, fair-haired and rather handsome, spent much of his spare time at the piano. Having played for his living at a dance hall in some German town, before the war, he rattled off his empty, jingling tunes with a certain professional skill.

When he grew tired of this strumming, he would go to the little room beside the kitchen, where Svetlana's bed and desk now stood, and ask the girl to play for him. This Svetlana bluntly and resolutely refused to do; but he became daily more persistent.

When the Germans were away from home, Svetlana would sit for hours at the piano, playing for herself. Opanasenko, listening from the kitchen, where he and his wife now lived, would exclaim delightedly:

“That’s music, now. Our music. Real music. Not their silly tinkling—dum da da, dum da da. Why, when we beat the gong at the shop before tapping a melt, even, we used to make better music than that German does.”

Saturdays were particularly unpleasant. The Hitlerites would usually bathe on Saturdays, splashing water over the bathroom floor and spattering the walls with soapsuds. It would be no easy task for Praskovya Petrovna to bring the room to rights when they were done.

“What can we do, Praskovya?” Opanasenko would mumble guiltily. “There’s no helping it. Just make up your mind to bear it.”

Towards eight o’clock Saturday evening, the Germans would leave for the brothel, where they usually remained until Sunday morning. Bolting the door behind them, Opanasenko would draw a long breath of relief. For a few hours, at least, he could live in peace and quiet, and feel himself once more the master in his own home. Often, on such nights, he would take a candle and wander about the house, glancing in at every room.

Once, returning down the hall towards the kitchen, he noticed a yellow gleam of light coming through the crack under Svetlana's door. He tiptoed softly to the door and looked in at the keyhole. Svetlana was at her desk, writing something industriously. Just so, with her head bent gracefully a little to the side, had she been wont to sit over her lessons. Opanasenko opened the door. Startled, she seized a little heap of notebook paper from the desk and pressed it to her body. Then she saw that the intruder was her father; but the fright did not vanish from her eyes.

"Afraid of me. As if I were a German," Opanasenko thought sorrowfully.

One sheet of paper had remained on the desk. Over the text, he saw the familiar red star.

He took his daughter in his arms and pressed her close, swallowing hard to restrain the tears. Then, kissing her tenderly as he never had before, he turned and left the room.

Next morning, catching a moment when Praskovya Petrovna was out of the house, he went to Svetlana and asked for one of her leaflets.

"If you can trust me," he added.

"Only be careful," she said, as she gave it to him. "You've got Sasha around at the shop, you know, and he's a volunteer."

"We're a decent lot," Shabotov grumbled drunkenly. "You might as well go to a dangerous place."

"That won't be difficult. Shabotov is such a ruffian of a soldier. We have to get to Ingria soon and bring our guns to our *Wichsel* station."

Chernasenka shrank as though he were struck. During his anxiety to get the guns

But it was not the teacher that the drunkie.

One Sunday morning two of the officers returned from the bistro no

than usual. The third did not return at

Not until Monday did Chernasenka learn what had taken place. Chernasenka

that a hand grenade had been hung in

brothel window, just before dawn, at Chernasenka's third lodger had been

the spot.

Next Saturday, the Germans stayed. A large company gathered in their room, drunken songs resounding, intermingling

laughter and women's wail. Then the fair-haired officer saw the pistol again, length, however, evidently freed himself, he came staggering down the hallway.

"He's a good lad, Sasha," Opanasenko returned shakily. "And you're a good girl, too. Only it's so dangerous."

"That can't be helped, father," Svetlana said, with a ghost of a smile. "Mother prays to her God to forgive your sins, but I must make up for your sins to our Motherland."

Opanasenko shrank as though he had been struck. Turning heavily, he left the room.

But it was not the leaflets that brought catastrophe.

One Sunday morning, two of the Hitlerite officers returned from the brothel much earlier than usual. The third did not return at all.

Not until Monday did Praskovya Petrovna learn what had taken place. Neighbours whispered that a hand grenade had been flung in at the brothel window, just before daybreak; and the Opanasenkos' third lodger had been killed on the spot.

Next Saturday, the Germans stayed at home. A large company gathered in their rooms. Soon drunken songs resounded, interrupted by loud laugh'er and women's shrill cries. For some time, the fair-haired officer kept the piano jangling. At length, however, evidently tired of this exertion, he came staggering down the hall to Svetlana's

room and demanded that she play for his guests. She refused. Then the German locked the door to the kitchen, where Opanasenko and his wife were sitting, twisted the girl's arms behind her, and dragged her to the parlour.

A good manager, Opanasenko. His locks were strong, his doors hung on sturdy hinges. Try as he might, he could not wrench open the kitchen door. Half wild with horror and wrath, he rushed out to the woodshed and seized a hatchet, then, hurrying back to the kitchen, began to hack furiously at the door.

When at last the lower panel was out, and he could squeeze his great bulk through, he found Svetlana lying in the hall, unconscious, her bruised face covered with blood, the fingers of both hands black and swollen.

Only by protracted effort could her parents restore her to consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered open, and she whispered faintly:

"I didn't play for them. I never will. Ugh, the things I saw in there! Naked women...."

Again she sank into forgetfulness.

Monday came. Opanasenko's hours at the works dragged on, an endless nightmare, in tormenting anxiety for his daughter. At last the whistle sounded, and he could hurry home. Praskovya Petrovna ran to meet him, frantic with grief, and

sobbed out her story on his breast. Svetlana had been taken off by politsais.

Opanasenko tapped at the parlour door.

The fair-haired German heard out his faltering plea with cold contempt.

“She iss one bad und stubborn girl,” he said brusquely, when Opanasenko had finished. “I haff help her for to go in Germany. Our ladies will to teach her better manners.”

He pointed to the door.

All next day Opanasenko trudged about the town, returning time and again to the employment bureau, to the town council, to police headquarters. He even succeeded in receiving an audience with the burgomaster. But nothing he could do or say was of any avail. They would not even tell him Svetlana’s destination. He tried the railway station, where the warehouses were used as temporary jails for those awaiting despatch to Germany; but he was turned back at the outer gate.

Returning home, late in the evening, he found politsais waiting in the kitchen to arrest him for absence from work without leave.

All week he was kept on the works territory, under guard, as punishment for this offence.

And all week he did not speak a word to any of his comrades. Even Sasha was powerless to draw him out.

When, opportunity offering, the workers dropped their tools to rest and smoke, he would sit among them like a statue, staring blankly straight ahead. Sometimes, with a groan, he would sink his face in his hands; and heavy tears would roll down his grimy fingers.

At home, in the meantime, life went on as usual. A new German appeared in place of the one killed at the brothel. As always, three pair of boots were set out in the hall for blacking every night. Only the fair-haired Hitlerite began to grow a beard. The deep scratches on his cheeks made shaving impossible.

Opanasenko got home on Saturday evening—unwashed, unshaven, perceptibly aged in these few days. He flung himself down on his bed without undressing, and lay there motionless, in such stony silence that Praskovya Petrovna dared not speak to him.

In the Germans' rooms, festivities were commencing. Repeated knockings at the front door announced the arrival of numerous guests. There was a popping of corks, a tinkling of bottles and glasses. Women laughed shrilly. Then the floor began to vibrate to the tramp of dancing feet. Drunken shouts and laughter sounded ever louder. To Praskovya Petrovna, it seemed that the brothel had moved into her home, this night. Glancing

at her husband, still motionless on the bed, she wondered dully how he could sleep through it all.

As the night drew on, the merriment gradually ceased. At length, the house was completely still.

Opanasenko got up, and threw back his shoulders sharply. Now, looking into his face, Praskovya Petrovna realized that he had not been asleep, that he had been waiting tensely for this moment.

“Bundle up as warm as you can, Praskovya Petrovna,” he said, turning his face away. “Let’s get out of here.”

When she was ready, in a warm coat and shawl, he opened the door for her, and whispered:

“Wait for me by the gate.”

A good manager, Opanasenko. His house had always been well supplied. And, safely hidden in the depths of his locked and bolted storeroom, there was still a goodly supply of kerosene.

A goodly supply, in a tall container—no easy load to carry. But Opanasenko did not find it heavy.

Softly opening the door to the parlour, he peered in at the Germans sprawled haphazard over the floor and the furniture. Soon he found what he was seeking. The fair-haired Hitlerite lay

fast asleep among his guests. Deep, long scratches disfigured his unshaven cheeks. Opanasenko shuddered violently. Stepping cautiously forward with his burden, he began to drip kerosene onto the rug.

A stout, red-haired German sniffed in his sleep, and sneezed. But he did not wake.

Opanasenko laid the container down on its side, letting the kerosene pour out freely. Returning to the hall, he set fire to a kerosene-soaked towel and threw it in at the parlour door. Swift streaks of flame went darting across the rug. Opanasenko shut the parlour door, turned the key twice in the lock, and left the house, locking every door behind him as he went. His wife was waiting at the gate. He took her arm and led her quickly away, without a backward glance. And she went with him, as she had always done, asking no questions and making no complaint.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

Vladislav Smakovsky was up against it.

At first he waited, in the hope that von Wechter might recall him to the works. But the baron showed no inclination to change his mind. At length, Smakovsky began to seek employment

elsewhere. This, however, turned out to be quite a difficult matter. No positions of any consequence were offered him. He might have received some petty clerking job at the town council—as book-keeper's assistant, say, in the utilities department. But that was clearly far beneath his dignity. Only in one place was he well received: police headquarters, where he was offered an appointment as chief of the political department. This, after some vacillation, he declined. It was flattering, but dangerous. He had no desire to risk his life a second time.

Completing his round of the town organizations, Smakovsky realized clearly that he had nothing to look forward to. Day after day, after breakfasting on whatever Irina had been able to get at the market place in exchange for clothing or household goods, he would hurry away from home to avoid questions and reproaches. Nor did this do him much good. His own thoughts were no more pleasant than her biting words.

For, looking back over his life, Smakovsky began to understand, clearly as never before, how mistaken he had been in attempting to base his career on lies and deceit.

Yes, Dmitri, his elder brother, had been wiser. On getting out of school, Dmitri had immediately

broken with his family. Later, on learning of his father's defection to Germany, he had promptly and publicly condemned it.

Vladislav, on the other hand, had sought refuge in concealment. To himself he had pretended, not altogether successfully, that he loved his father too dearly, respected him too highly, to resolve on public condemnation. Love, indeed! It had been nothing more than cowardice—than mortal terror lest this deplorable development hinder his career. He had dropped his studies, and later, under a slightly altered name, enrolled in a different institute. In his last year, however, this deception had been brought to light. Arriving at one of the Donbas works for student practice, Smakovskv had been recognized by the secretary of the works Party organization, Gayevoi, who had worked with his father in Siberia. A general student meeting had demanded Smakovskv's expulsion; but, after much pleading, he had been allowed to complete the year and earn his diploma. On graduation, he had been assigned to a position at the same works where he had been exposed. Then life had proceeded normally enough, until the war broke out and turned everything topsy-turvy.

From the first day of the war, Smakovskv's every action had been based upon the firm con-

viction that Germany would be the victor. He had hoped great things from friendship with the "conquerors"; but his hopes had been bitterly disappointed.

Thoughts of the past were painful; of the present—unbearable; of the future—terrifying. If one could only manage not to think at all! But something had to be done, some way found of earning his bread. Take a pick and go to work with Opanasenko's crew, in the open-hearth shop? Endure their mocking smiles and caustic sarcasms? No. There seemed no solution to his difficulty. Why had he stayed here to meet the Germans? Again, as in his youth, he had chosen the wrong path. Again he found himself in a blind alley.

Yet he had been warned.

Gayevoi had sent for him, during the evacuation.

"I'm sorry to disturb you after hours," he had begun, "but right now all hours are more or less the same. Draw up a chair. I want to talk to you."

Sitting down, Smakovskiy had lit a cigarette and waited silently for the Party secretary to go on.

"I wonder," Gayevoi had asked, "were you very much surprised at being assigned to this

particular works, when you graduated? I suppose you were. Surprised and, probably, displeased."

Smakovskiy had shrugged noncommittally.

"It was done at my request," Gayevoi had continued. "And I can tell you why I made that request. I knew your father, knew him only too well, and I hoped you might be prevented from following in his footsteps. I've taken some interest in you, these past years. At times it has seemed to me that the works environment was doing its job, was providing the training your parents deprived you of by keeping you out of school. But at other times I've been worried and upset by the sort of things I've heard you say. And just now I'm very much afraid...."

"That I'll follow my father? That the apple falls near the tree?" Smakovskiy had put in harshly.

"No. I have no faith in such theories. They're sufficiently disproved by your own brother. What worries me—what has always bothered me—is a different thing: your dislike for everything Russian. What's the cause of it? Your diploma thesis, for example—you didn't mention a single Russian authority. But we needn't dwell on that. The point is, your general attitude. There was a conversation one day—perhaps you remember it—in

the course of which you remarked that the Russian character, to you, remains an unknown quantity. Other national characters, you said, have their specific, clearly outlined traits: vivacity in the French, practical common sense in the British, pedantry in the Germans. That seems to be your conception of national character: some one clearly outlined trait, more conspicuous than others. And the Russian character appears to you indefinite, amorphous, lacking specific traits of any kind. Right? Isn't that how you put it?"

"Yes, that's so," Smakovskiy had been compelled to admit.

"And I suppose it's never occurred to you," Gayevoy had continued, "that the Russian character is not to be summed up in any one trait; that it must be seen from all its many aspects, like an intricately cut gem, to be properly appreciated. Nor, I suppose, have you ever noticed that the most glorious of all these many aspects is—self-abnegating love for the Soviet Motherland. You've never stopped to think about these things. I know—Give them a little thought."

But his advice had fallen on barren soil. Smakovskiy's mind had been occupied with only one thing, at the moment: uneasy surmises as to what might be the purpose of this interview. Gayevoy had proceeded:

"You made a grave misstep at one time. It was forgiven, and never cast up against you. You received every opportunity to rehabilitate yourself, to earn trust and confidence. Today, it's up to you to pass the political test: to evacuate with the works, to work and defend your Motherland—Russia. Russians have only one Motherland. They can have no other, ever. And another thing: it was the Soviet state that made you an engineer. You have that debt to pay. There, that's all I wanted to say. I won't detain you any longer. Think it over."

Inwardly fuming, Smakovsky had thanked Gayevoi for his attention, and at the same time expressed a certain surprise that, in days like these, the Party secretary should have found time for such a conversation. He was very grateful for this solicitude, of course, but, nonetheless, profoundly and undeservedly injured. How could the Party secretary doubt for an instant his, Smakovsky's, utter devotion to the Motherland? Was this, perhaps, the result of slander?

But Gayevoi had only shrugged and, looking deep into Smakovsky's eyes, dismissed him.

Had Smakovsky's career under the Germans turned out as successfully as he had hoped, this conversation might never have recurred to mind—except, perhaps, as something to make mock of.

Now, however, every word then said came back as clearly as though it had been but yesterday.

"Gayevoi was right," he mused. "I should have evacuated and kept on working. That was the only thing to do—in any case, for those who had faith in their country, for those who loved it."

But Smakovsky had neither faith nor love. All his life, he had admired only that which was not Russian—had looked up to foreigners, of whatever nationality, considering them wiser, stronger, and more highly organized than his fellow countrymen. Why, then, should he have evacuated, when at last opportunity offered of merging with these superior beings?

Worst of all was his feeling of guilt towards Irina. It had been his persuasion that had made her stay; and now she was condemned to misery.

Only one hope remained: if Irina could be persuaded to go to von Wechter and plead for her husband, then, perhaps.... It was some time before Smakovsky could key himself up to this request. At length, however, over a particularly meagre breakfast, he attempted a roundabout approach to the subject.

Irina understood immediately what he had in mind, and what he was counting on. She nodded

agreement, without a word. Noting the barely perceptible twitch of her lips, however, he realized that he had lost all remnant of her esteem.

Von Wechter received Irina very cordially, heaping her with elaborate compliments; but he refused to hear a word about her husband.

"It's purely a man's affair," he told her, smiling. "A situation for you, now—that's a different story. That I can discuss with pleasure."

And he offered her a place as his secretary.

Irina accepted without a moment's hesitation. This talk had made it very clear to her that she had no one to rely on but herself.

After work one day, as she was preparing to leave for home, von Wechter called her into his office.

"Frau Irène," he said, "I have a favour to ask of you. Help me arrange the furnishings in my apartment. A woman's dainty taste is so essential in such matters."

An unexpected request, and, perhaps, not altogether a tactful one. But Irina agreed.

The baron's apartment was a veritable furniture warehouse, filled to overflowing with large and ill-assorted articles collected from many different homes. There were two grand pianos, and half a dozen sofas. Several paintings stood about,

with their faces to the walls. Irina's heart sank. Only by dint of long and strenuous effort, with the aid of four sturdy soldiers who shifted the heavy things about from place to place at her bidding, did she succeed in transforming this display of loot into something more or less reminiscent of a human dwelling place.

On the third evening she pronounced the task completed. The baron, highly pleased, asked her to play hostess at his housewarming.

A brilliant company assembled, the very cream of local society: Pfau, Gestapo chief Sonnewald, the commander of the local garrison, and several officers. The festivities continued until morning; for it was not safe to walk the streets at night.

Irina did not return home that day, or on any of the following days.

She never looked back. Having once set her foot on the ladder, she advanced lightly from rung to rung—upwards, she was convinced. She felt no regrets, no vacillation. No shadow of remorse stirred in her paltry soul. Life was forming itself after her dreams. Some day, von Wechter would take her to Germany. She could see it all so vividly! Riding through Berlin, she would recognize the streets—had she not read of them, in so many novels!—with the air of one

returning to familiar scenes after a protracted absence.

"Ah, yes, this is Unter den Linden," she would say to the baron as they drove along that handsome avenue.

The past seldom came to mind, and aroused no qualms of conscience. Who, in her place, would have acted differently? No one! Of that she had no doubt. Given the same good luck, who could have turned it down? Why, even Krainev, who had sincerely wanted to evacuate, and had tried to persuade her, too, to leave—even Krainev, when by some incomprehensible turn of fate he remained in town, had changed front fast enough and gone to work for the Germans. And besides, what could she be reproached with? She had done no one any harm. If people were suffering, that was not her fault. And as to her private life, surely that was her own, to direct and order as she might please.

There were times when she missed her little boy. But after all, she told herself, she was better off without him. He might have annoyed von Wechter.

The days flowed on, in soothing monotony. Her hours at the office over, Irina would hurry home to set the table. Exactly at five, von Wechter would arrive for dinner.

Accustomed to his punctuality, she felt a vague uneasiness when, one day, he failed to appear at the usual hour. Six o'clock passed, and seven; and still he did not come. At length, the telephone rang. Von Wechter's voice sounded in the receiver.

"I have unpleasant news, Irène," he murmured smoothly. "My wife is arriving tomorrow morning. You'll understand, of course, that you and I must part. Oh, temporarily, only temporarily! I'm sending a car around, and the orderly will help you pack your things and move to other rooms. We'll meet there, in time, my angel."

As he spoke, the receiver seemed to grow heavier and heavier in Irina's hand, until she felt that in another moment she must let it fall.

An hour later the orderly, loaded with valises, led her upstairs in a house she had never seen before, and ushered her into her new quarters—a room in some apartment occupied by utter strangers.

The night passed in dreary reflections. Next morning, as usual, Irina set out for the works.

At the gates she was stopped by the *politsai* on duty. Spreading his arms to bar the way, he told her mockingly:

"No go, my girl. You're not to be let in. The baron's orders."

Irina turned sharply on her heel and hurried away. After a while, however, she turned back. Yes, she would wait at the gates until von Wech-ter came out. She would slap his smooth-shaven, aristocratic mug. She would spit into his muddy blue eyes, under the heavy lids.

But five o'clock was far away. Too long, too humiliating, to stand about and wait. She dragged herself home and dropped into bed. Alarmed by her condition, the mistress of the apartment ran off to fetch a doctor.

Irina recognized the doctor when he came: a little old man, known as the town's best physician. He sank into a chair, panting for breath. He had heart trouble, and walking tired him. Before the war, the clinic had always provided a car to take him to his patients.

When he had rested a few minutes, he got out a pair of glasses, raised them carefully, in trembling fingers, to his eyes, and glanced at the patient. He was on his feet immediately.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed. "There's been some misunderstanding. I don't treat adults. I'm a children's doctor."

Irina knew that he was lying. She did not answer, but her eyes flashed hate.

The old man moved slowly towards the door. Pausing at the threshold, he said into space:

"The Germans hanged a young girl yesterday. She worked in the machine shop. They hanged her because she struck a German soldier when he tried to molest her. Yes, she struck out, knowing the penalty, rather than. . . . Mmm."

He flung open the door and left.

Irina bit her lip to the quick.

Somehow, she must live, must find means of subsistence. The contents of her valises soon melted away at the market place. It was little enough that she could get for her pretty clothes. People had no need of such things, nowadays. Clothing was bought for utility and warmth.

Irina decided to try her luck with Pfaul.

The Kommandant received her warmly; but his insinuating gallantry put her at once on her guard. He heard out her request for employment with an air of the utmost readiness to understand and assist.

"Why, nothing could be simpler," he declared, smiling. "We have an establishment in town—well, a pleasure resort, one might call it, exclusively for officers. . . ."

Irina sprang to her feet.

"No, no, don't think any evil!" Pfaul exclaimed reassuringly. "You will be simply the

hostess, the adornment, you see, of the drawing room."

"You're forgetting," Irina flared. "You're forgetting that I . . . that I . . ."

He met her fury with a mocking smile.

"You're forgetting a great deal yourself, my little sweetheart," he returned. "Hadn't we better forget about memories?"

Irina turned and ran.

When she got outdoors, the day was damp and foggy, and she could see nothing ahead.

When Irina left him for von Wechter, Smakovsky sought solace in drink. Like all people of his type—insolent when fortune smiles, but losing balance at the first sign of trouble—he began to go to pieces rapidly. His rooms grew daily barer, the furnishings going in exchange for vodka.

Then, one day, Pivovarov came to see him.

Drink had not improved Smakovsky's appearance. His face was bloated, his eyes clouded over, his clothing rumpled and stained. Pivovarov hedged about for some time, debating with himself what help he might expect from such a deplorable wreck. In the end, however, he blurted out his story, concealing only the visit he had paid to Valsky.

Smakovsky's intoxication vanished instantly. He had always disliked Krainev, and of late this dislike had developed into a mixture of fear and inveterate hate. To avoid meeting Krainev, after the latter's reappearance at the works, Smakovsky, despite his duties as works manager, had entirely excluded the machine shop from his daily rounds of inspection. And now, if all that Pivovarov said was true, Krainev could be done away with, and the Germans' favour regained, at one swift blow.

"Your proofs?" Smakovsky demanded tersely.

"What do you mean—proofs?" flared Pivovarov. "Lobachov was waiting impatiently for the Germans. He didn't stay here to wreck. Why, he had a hundred thousand marks, all safe, in a Berlin bank! He told me so himself."

Lobachov, it seemed, being sent to Germany some years before to purchase needed equipment, had switched an order from the Demag to the Bamag concern in return for a bribe received from the latter.

"And anyway," Pivovarov continued, "the thing's as clear as daylight. What proof do you need? Look—Lobachov knew I'd been a White officer in the Civil War, and not the Red Guard fighter I made myself out to be. He knew it for years, and yet he never blabbed."

Smakovsky's elation grew with every word.

"There's only one thing," Pivovarov concluded. "I'm afraid to go to the Germans. They'd believe you, though, if you told them about it. Help me out, won't you, Vladislav Grigoryevich?"

"Yes, I'll help you," Smakovsky answered firmly; and, having shown his guest to the door, he sat down to think over the best course of action.

He could not make up his mind to go to the Gestapo. The very memory of Sonnewald's frosty eyes sent a shiver up his spine. In the end, he went to Pfau, at the Kommandantur, and set forth in full detail all that he had learned from Pivovarov. Pfau heard the story out with an air of complete indifference; but as soon as Smakovsky had left he hurried to Sonnewald's office. The Gestapo chief was out, however, and did not return until late in the evening.

When Pfau had made his report, Sonnewald called in the head of his information department, who soon appeared with a folder labelled "Krainev."

Sonnewald leafed the folder attentively. There were several informers' reports, describing Krainev's active work during the evacuation period and the manner of his little boy's departure for

the Urals. Another report, signed by the chief of the guards at the power station, described the strange conduct of the chief of the Russian guards during his visit to the station.

"Have him arrested at once, and bring him here to me, tied hand and foot," Sonnewald commanded, shutting the folder.

The head of the information department hurried out. Turning to Pfaul, Sonnewald remarked:

"Big game, that protégé of yours, Herr Kommandant."

Pfaul hung his head, but insisted glumly:

"Well, but, look here: you know yourself they tried to kill him."

"Play acting."

"Never! You can't act a thing like that!"

Pfaul's voice rang with conviction. He did not care about Krainev; it was himself he was defending.

But Sonnewald replied, with a grim smile: "It's easily explained. There were several partisan groups in town at that time, and—fortunately for us—they were still unconnected, didn't know one another's plans. Hence, the attempt on Krainev. Simple enough!"

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

The Hitlerite officer examined the bomb, then gave some order to one of the soldiers. The soldier went off, and did not return for quite some time. Settling down to wait, the workers began to roll "horseleg" cigarettes. Krainev, too, felt in his pocket; but his supply of cigarettes had ended. He went up to the workers and asked for a smoke. Nobody moved to comply with his request. They did not even seem to see or hear him.

Krainev turned away. He had grown used to this atmosphere of hatred. The more the workers hated him, the more highly he respected them.

The soldier returned, carrying a set of wrenches. With elaborate care, he removed the detonator from the bomb. This done, the officer nodded carelessly, as though to say that now the Russian chief of guards might dispose of the bomb as he pleased, and strode away, followed by the soldiers.

Greatly relieved, Krainev ordered his men back to work. They loaded the bomb onto the waiting cars, and rolled the cars to a nearby siding. By a mere shift of the switch, this siding could be connected with that part of the line

which led downhill into the boiler room of the power station.

Evening was gathering by the time the work was done. The men all left. Now it remained only to wait for darkness.

Noticing a few stubs among the coal, Krainev picked them up, crushed them in his palm, and rolled himself a cigarette. The bitter smoke made him cough, but he noticed neither taste nor odour.

More than once, he put his watch to his ear, thinking it must have stopped—so slowly did the moments drag. Time itself seemed to have come to a standstill. Would it never end, this dreary winter day?

The last light faded. Krainev peered intently through the darkness. Nothing suspicious. He circled the coal yard. Nothing. He waited, listening. Not a sound came through the night but the rattle of furnace doors being opened and shut in the boiler room. He walked down the track, and shifted the switch.

All at once, his firm restraint collapsed. With furiously beating heart, he ran back to the bomb and set to work, stuffing ammonite into the space where the detonator had been and adjusting his own detonators and fuses. He worked with feverish haste; yet it seemed to him that he was losing far too much time.

Now all was ready. He set a match to the fuses. They caught.

Running to the back of the cars, he tried to set them moving. They did not budge. He pushed with all his might. They did not budge. The grease in the axle boxes had frozen.

His knees buckled, and he sank to the ground. But he was up again immediately, pushing desperately.

The fuses burned steadily, closer and closer to the detonators. It was as though the fire licked at his own limbs. The cars did not move.

Suddenly, a door creaked. Two figures emerged from the shanty in the corner of the coal yard, and came running towards Krainev.

Familiar figures, both of them. Now they were close enough to recognize: Serdyuk, and Pyotr Prasolov. Serdyuk, coming up first, immediately put his shoulder to the cars. They moved. They were off, down the slope, bouncing slightly over the joints of the rails. Krainev ran behind, still pushing. Then he let go, but did not turn back until he saw the bomb go in through the boiler room door.

“Come back!” Serdyuk was calling. “Come back, you crazy fool!”

Watching Krainev from the shanty, he had glanced at his watch when the fuses were fired.

They had been timed to burn eight minutes. Only three remained.

Krainev turned back, and all three ran up the tracks, following the line that led away from the town.

"Down!" Serdyuk cried, dropping to the ground.

Krainev and Prasolov dropped beside him. The earth shook under them. Deafened by the explosion, they did not hear the clatter of flying sheets of iron, the tinkle of broken glass, the crash of falling bricks. But, sitting up, they saw a huge black column of smoke rising over the power station.

Krainev sat motionless, a happy smile playing on his lips.

"Let's go," Serdyuk said, jogging his shoulder.

They left the tracks and ran straight across the drifted snow. Soon they were over the works wall and out in the open steppe.

"Well, now your work behind the lines is over," Serdyuk told Krainev. "But ours is just beginning. Give our greetings to our people over there. Good luck to you. If we come through alive, we'll meet again."

He embraced Krainev, and turned away.

“We'll come through, all right. And we'll be expecting you with the Red Army,” said Prasolov confidently, enclosing Krainev's proffered hand in a firm, comradely grip.

And so they parted.

Krainev strode on across the steppe, towards the faint line of light at the horizon. His heart was full to overflowing with a poignant, long unknown happiness.

The boundless spaces of his Motherland lay before him.